lieu of allowing the appropriated funds to cease when the first incumbrance upon them should be paid off, they should be continued positively until the year last mentioned, and that such further sum as could be raised upon the credit of their surplus produce within that period should be made available to these new improvements. The committee having, however, been subsequently induced to recommend for early adoption some other plans, the cost of which could not be brought within the compass of that arrangement, they ultimately recommended to Parliament the extension of the several duties composing the fund in question for four years, viz. until the 5th of July, 1862, a recommendation which Parliament adopted. By means of the resources thus created, provision was made for the final cost of the four first-mentioned plans. But with regard to the three last enumerated, the sums applicable to them are only to be advanced in aid of monies to be provided by other parties, and on the express condition that they should be completed by those parties with that assistance. Upon that principle 25,000*l.* is to be assigned to the Clerkenwell line, 30,000*l.* to the proposed communication between Southwark and Westminster-bridge, and 39,000*l.* to the proposed improvements in Westminster.

It may be proper, however, that we should here observe, that as the nature of these improvements involves not only the ultimate cost thus to be provided for, but also an intermediate outlay of very large sums for the purchase of existing interests, a part only of which will be hereafter recovered by the disposal of new sites for building, the Commissioners of Woods, &c., were authorized by Parliament to raise the sums required for these advances on the credit of the land revenues of the Crown, without which measures the works could not have been executed.

The purchases authorized by Parliament out of monies, part of those revenues for the formation of a park, to be called "Victoria Park," in the neighbourhood of Hackney and Bethnal-green, are now in progress, in conformity with a plan which is annexed to the eighteenth report of the said Commissioners to her Majesty and Parliament. From the peculiar nature of the occupancy of much of this ground, which is held by market-gardeners, the purchases and clearings of the respective properties have been necessarily dependent upon seasons, but the formation of the park, we are informed, will be begun in the course of the present year.

EMBANKMENT OF THE THAMES.

Upon a careful review of the many subjects of improvement for which plans had already been before the public, or were subsequently submitted to us, we considered an embankment of the river Thames to have the first claim to our attention.

For a considerable period the condition of a large portion of the river in its passage through the metropolis has been the subject of observation and complaint; and although measures have at different times been submitted to Parliament, having its improvements for their object, yet nothing of a comprehensive nature has been effected.

The causes of the great change which has taken place in the bed of the river Thames, in that portion of its course which lies between London and Westminster-bridges, may be shortly stated. Among the first, if not the very first, of these in recent times, may be considered the removal of old London-bridge—a measure, no doubt ultimately beneficial to the interests of the river as a whole, but prejudicial for a time to the navigation immediately above it.

The operation of this change upon the condition of the river, and especially in the portions between the bridges, though great, and, as already observed, no doubt the immediate cause of the present embarrassment experienced in the navigation, has been uniform in its effects, and consistent in its character. It has produced, as was anticipated, a higher rise and lower fall of the tide than heretofore, and is producing, as was also to be expected, a general, though not uniform, lowering of the level of the river bed.

While the first of these consequences, however, has been immediate and manifest, the second, it is obvious, if left to the operation of natural causes, must necessarily be the work of time; and hence, in the interval, the navigation of the river must be difficult at certain states of the tide.

The shoals and irregularities, however, which constitute the greater portion of this difficulty, are, in the evidence before us, attributed to other causes. We are referred to a want of uniformity in the bends and curves of the river, to the disproportion between the breadth and volume of its waters, and probably to the varying nature of the material forming its bed, as natural agents in working out these results, and, as artificial causes, to projections and recesses in the shores, irregular dredging, and other evils alleged to have arisen from imperfect conservancy.

The conservancy of the river Thames is a privilege and a trust vested in the corporation of London by very ancient charters, confirmed and renewed at various periods. The exact extent of the rights and of the duties thereby assigned to that body have been the subjects of much diversity of opinion, and of dispute and controversy both in and out of Parliament, strongly shewing the necessity for some legal decision, or legislative adjustment, upon a matter of so much practical importance. Upon these points, however, it does not appear to us that it is within the province of this commission to express an opinion; we therefore conceive that we shall sufficiently discharge our duty under this head, by soliciting the attention of your Majesty to the information furnished on this subject (extracts of which are annexed to this report) by the Commissioners on Municipal Corporations, by the committee of Parliament on the port of London, and by the City of London Navigation Committee.

Under the authority of the corporation of London, and, on some occasions, under special authorities obtained from Parliament, the river has been extensively, though not systematically embanked, and its water-way irregularly contracted, as will be seen by a plan, annexed to this report, of that portion of the river which flows immediately through the centre of the metropolis.

Other embankments we find are in progress at the present time, under licences granted by the corporation, of which embankments plans are also appended.

The effect of these partial and occasional embankments has been from time to time to alter the currents of the river, and to impair its navigable channel.

The embankments constructed under the authority of Parliament are few. The first of these was projected by Sir Christopher Wren immediately after the fire of London. The object of this embankment was "to make a commodious quay on the whole bank of the river from Blackfriars to the Tower;" and under the authority of the Act of Charles II. for rebuilding the city, and a subsequent Act of the same reign, it was partially carried into effect.

Under the first of these acts no house, outhouse, or other building whatsoever, was to be erected from Tower-wharf to Temple-stairs, within 40 feet of the river, cranes and sheds for present use only excepted.

Although few traces of such a way are at present to be found, yet a portion of it, from the Tower to Castle Baynard, was actually executed. Encroachments, however, were subsequently made upon it from time to time, and in the year 1821, "notwithstanding a very decided opposition to the measure in both Houses of Parliament, on the part of the corporation of London, and the inhabitants of Upper Thames-street and its vicinity," the Act in question was repealed.

No further plan for regulating or improving the banks of the river was entertained till the year 1767, when a measure was submitted to the corporation of London for raising 300,000*l.* for the completion of Blackfriars-bridge by embanking the north side of the river between Paul's Wharf and Milford-lane, upon a line extending about half a mile in length. Arrangements were subsequently entered into with the societies of the Middle and Inner Temple, and other parties, by which this embankment ultimately included the frontage of the Temple-gardens.

The terms in which this proposal was submitted to the corporation would apply with very little variation to many parts of the river at the present day; and considering that a century at least had then elapsed since any measure has been attempted for the "regulation and improvement" of its shores, and that another century has very nearly arrived at its completion, the statement is not unobserving of attention. "The wharfs," it is observed, "within those limits, by their different and very unequal encroachments, not only form an irregular and disagreeable outline, but afford the owners of some an undue preference and advantage over others; at the same time that the reflected set of the tides, both ebb and flood, throws the force of the stream upon the Surrey shore, opposite to Blackfriars, and of consequence slackens the current on the London side; this, together with the large sewers that empty themselves in the neighbourhood, occasions a constant accumulation of sand, mud, and rubbish, which not only destroys great part of the navigation at low water, but renders the wharfs inaccessible by the loaded craft, even at high water, unless at spring tides; the mud and filth thus accumulated, notwithstanding the frequent expense the wharfingers are at to clear it away, is, when not covered with water, extremely offensive, and in summer time often dangerous to the health of the neighbouring inhabitants."—The corporation of London, it is presumed, acquiesced in the correctness of these statements, inasmuch as they adopted the plan; and powers were subsequently given by Parliament for carrying it into effect.

The next embankment of importance took place at Durham-yard and the places adjacent, now known as the site of the Adelphi-terrace, and the buildings connected therewith. In the years 1768, 1769, and 1770, Messrs. Adam and other parties applied to the corporation of London for their consent to this embankment, but without effect. The Court of Common Council not concurring, the parties applied to Parliament for an Act enabling them to effect a large embankment in that vicinity, not in the lines originally proposed, which Act was subsequently obtained, notwithstanding the most decided opposition on the part of the corporation in every stage of the bill, and notwithstanding that the clauses subjecting the ground to be gained from the river to the acknowledgment originally offered to the corporation were not inserted in the Act.

Within a comparatively recent period, further embankments, upon a scale of considerable magnitude, have been effected in the same portion of the river. We refer especially to the embankment which forms a part of the present site of Hungerford-market, and which was sanctioned by the legislature in connection with that measure; and to the projection devised for the enlargement and rebuilding of the palace at Westminster for the accommodation of the new Houses of Parliament.

"During the last fifty years," it appears, "numerous grants have been made, under the sanction of the corporation, for embankments in various parts of the Thames, throughout the jurisdiction of the city of London, by which the general line of the river, to a certain extent," is alleged to have "been regulated and improved." It was not, however, until within the last fifteen years, and under an order of the common council, that the balance of monies received on this account, and for other accommodations on the river, after deducting the expenses applicable thereto, were brought in aid of the conservancy.

The insufficiency of the funds strictly applicable to the purposes of the conservancy appears to have long formed a subject of complaint on the part of the corporation, and we presume, that to this, among other causes, is to be attributed the fact that, as far back as there is any evidence of the defective condition of the river, previously to the year 1840, there is no trace of any measure for a general and systematic improvement of the navigation, or regulation of its banks, having originated with that body.

Of the attempts made in Parliament to apply a partial remedy to this state of things, mention will be made hereafter. They failed, as it appears to the commission, from causes which need not any longer operate:—In the first instance (in 1825), under an apprehension that the removal of old London-bridge was too recent to admit of any accurate opinion being formed as to its effects; in the second (in 1840), from the indefinite character of the measures proposed, and from the opposition of the wharfingers, and others in trade, to the plan

To learn how to use PDF Compression and OCR visit our website